

E0-17

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD

Washington, DC 20423

Office of Economics, Environmental Analysis, and Administration

March 4, 2003

Mr. Wayne White
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Sacramento Field Office
2800 Cottage Way, Room W-2605
Sacramento, CA 95825

Re: Finance Docket No. 34305, The Burlington Northern and Santa Fe
Railway Company – Construction and Operation Exemption – in Merced
County, California; Request for Information

Dear Wayne White:

On January 14, 2003, The Burlington Northern and Santa Fe Railway (BNSF or the Applicant) filed a petition with the Surface Transportation Board (Board) pursuant to 49 U.S.C. 10502 for authority to construct and operate a new rail line to Quebecor World Inc. in Merced County, California (CA). The project would involve an approximately 850-foot rail line that would connect the Quebecor World Inc. (Quebecor) printing and distribution facility in Merced, CA with BNSF's existing Stockton Subdivision mainline between Stockton and Bakersfield, CA. Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Board's environmental rules, the Board's Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) will prepare an environmental document that evaluates the potential environmental impacts of the proposed project. While preliminary biological analyses have indicated that the site is heavily disturbed, the purpose of this letter is to request information regarding potential resources within the project area that may be of concern to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, as well as any permits and approvals that might be required for project construction.

The proposed 850-foot rail line would connect Quebecor with the BNSF mainline, thereby providing Quebecor, which is presently served by the Union Pacific Railroad (UP), with competitive service. Quebecor is the leading print media services company in North America and in the world. It owns and operates the printing facility in Merced, CA, which is the largest printing facility on the West Coast. The proposed rail connection would be located in the northern portion of the City of Merced, in an area used primarily for agricultural and industrial activities. No residences or recreation lands are in the immediate vicinity.

The proposed line would cross an existing UP loop track and one public road, Santa Fe Avenue, at grade. Santa Fe Avenue is a two-lane light density road maintained by the City of Merced. The road crossing would utilize active warning devices. Both crossings would be designed in accordance with industry standards, customs and practices.

The line would be used to transport inbound shipments of non-hazardous paper rolls in boxcars. Outbound traffic would be primarily empty boxcars, but there may also be some shipments of waste paper (approximately one carload per week). BNSF expects that the traffic would generally consist of one inbound train per day with approximately 6 to 8 loaded boxcars, with the same train returning to pick up the empties. BNSF currently plans to provide service six days a week.

This letter begins the process by which SEA will assess the environmental effects, both positive and negative, that may be associated with the proposed rail line construction and operation. I am asking for your assistance in determining whether any resources of concern to your agency might be affected by the proposed project. Attached please find two maps showing the location of the proposed project.

Information on any additional issues or concerns that you consider appropriate would be appreciated. We request your response by April 7, 2003, so that we may be able to schedule any meetings, site visits, or surveys, conduct any necessary follow-up activities, and incorporate your response into the scope of the study, as appropriate. We may contact you prior to this date to discuss the project and schedule a meeting, if this would assist you in your review.

Myra L. Frank & Associates (MFA) is serving as the independent third-party consultant to SEA to assist SEA in the preparation of the environmental document. Please send your comments to:

Gary Petersen
Myra L. Frank & Associates, Inc.
811 West 7th Street
Suite 800
Los Angeles, California 90017

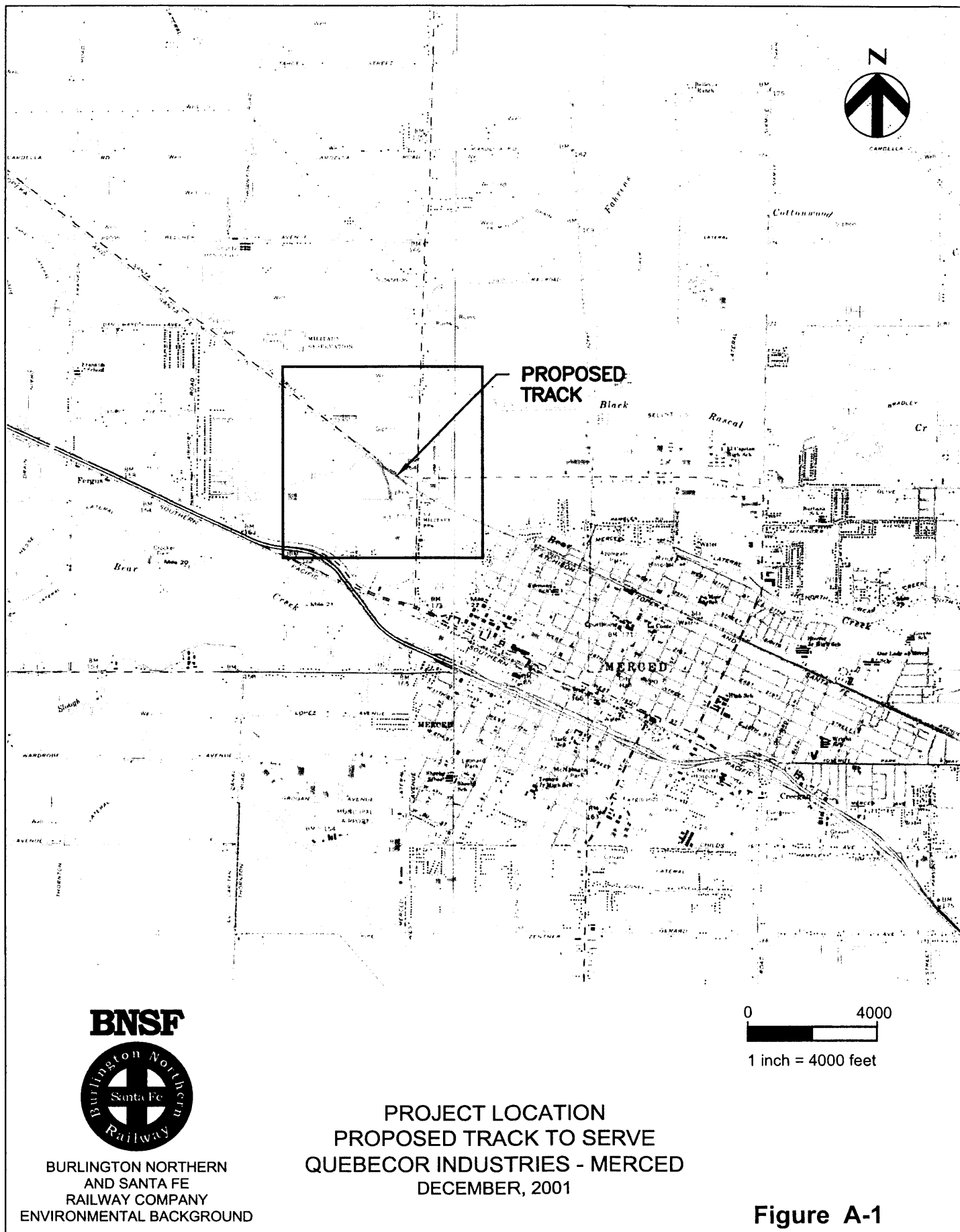
The environmental document will either be an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS). SEA's decision on whether to prepare an EA or an EIS will be based in part on comments received in response to this agency consultation letter. SEA will make the environmental document available for review by agencies and the public as required by NEPA and the Board's environmental rules (49 CFR 1105). In reaching its decision, the Board will take into account the environmental document and all environmental comments that are received. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Gary Petersen, MFA Project Manager, at (213) 627-5376, or Dave Navecky, SEA Project Manager, at (202) 565-1593. Thank you for your assistance.

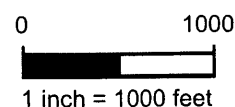
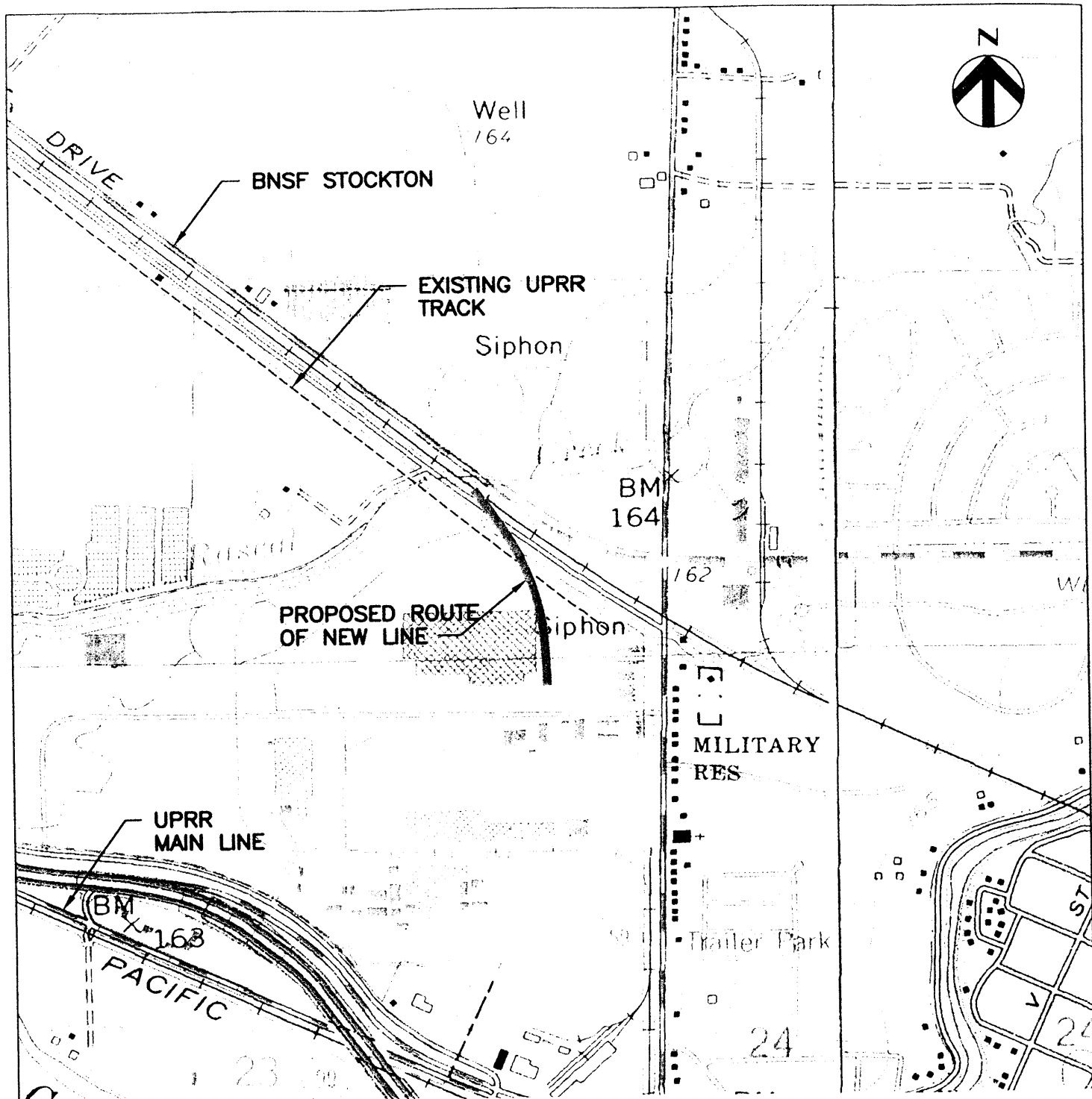
Sincerely,



Victoria Rutson
Chief
Section of Environmental Analysis

Enclosures: 2





BNSF



BURLINGTON NORTHERN
AND SANTA FE
RAILWAY COMPANY
ENVIRONMENTAL BACKGROUND

PROPOSED ALIGNMENT
PROPOSED TRACK TO SERVE
QUEBECOR INDUSTRIES - MERCED
DECEMBER, 2001

Figure A-2

21-Feb-03

21	Merced County Public W
22	Merced Irrigation District